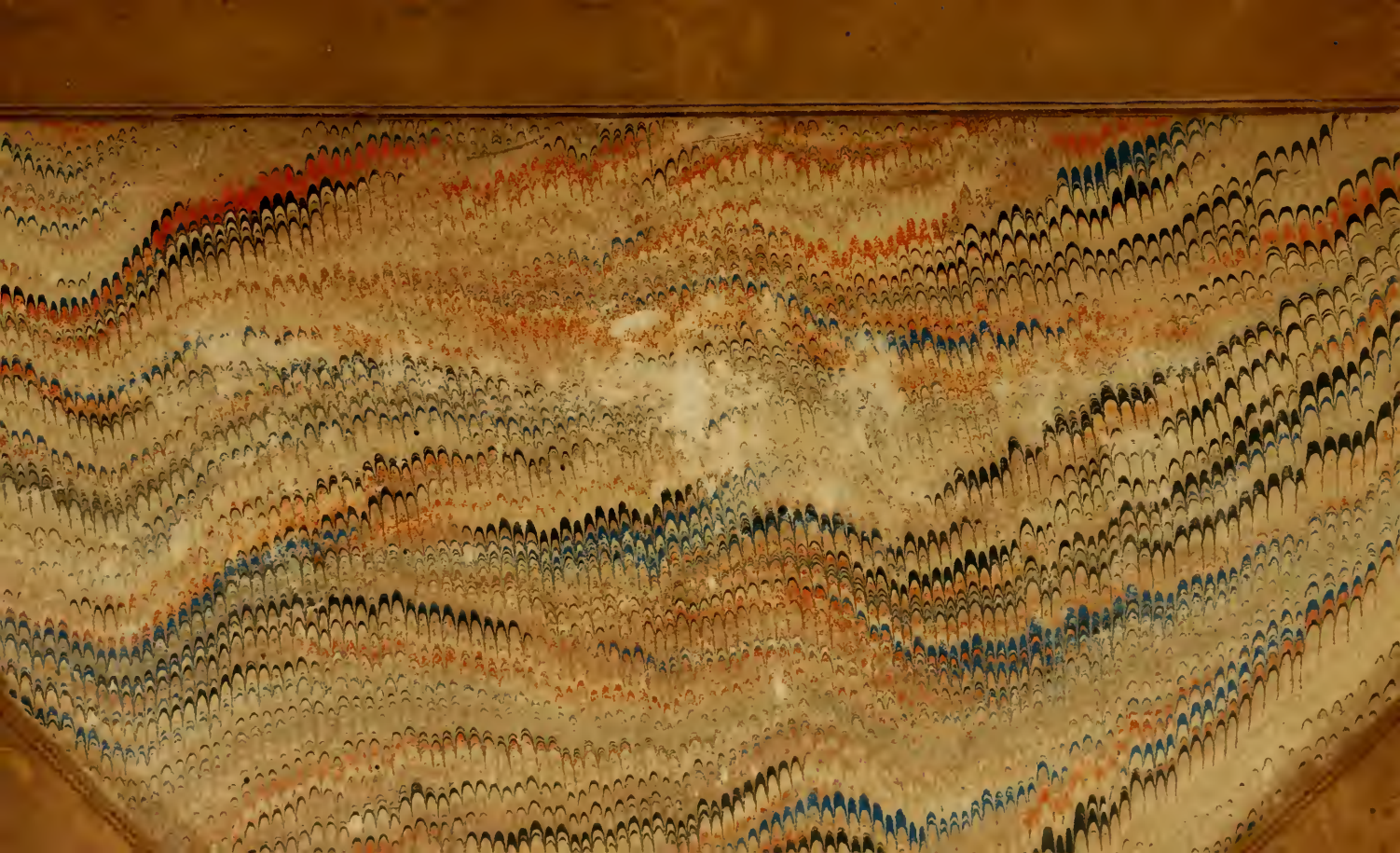

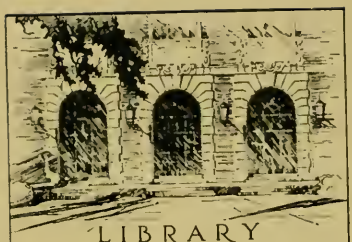

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THE

TRUE STRENGTH AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL ROYAL, WHITEHALL,

At the Consecration

OF THE

RIGHT REVEREND ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL TAIT, D.C.L.

BISHOP OF LONDON,

AND THE

RIGHT REV. HENRY COTTERILL, D.D.

BISHOP OF GRAHAMSTOWN,

ON SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1856.

BY

GEORGE EDWARD LYNCH COTTON, M.A.

MASTER OF MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE,

AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

"If men were quiet and charitable in all disagreeings, where lawfully they might, (and they may in most,) Christendom should no longer be rent in pieces, but would be redintegrated in a new Pentecost."—JEREMY TAYLOR. *Liberty of Prophesying.*

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PREFACE.

THE great importance and interest of the occasion on which this Sermon was preached might have been pleaded in excuse for its publication, even if this had not been rendered imperative by the desire of the Bishop of London, sanctioned and confirmed by that of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In these days, the Author cannot regret the opportunity of expressing, under such auspices, his belief that the true mission of the Church of England can only be fulfilled by a large increase in charity and mutual forbearance, and a resolution to turn away from unprofitable disputations, to the great work of rousing the mass of the people to a practical faith in Christian truth and Christian morality. For, as was said long ago by one of the greatest of Englishmen, "What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies? We reckon more than

four months yet to harvest; there need not be four weeks; had we but eyes to lift up, the fields are white already. Where there is much desire to learn, there will of necessity be much arguing, much writing, many opinions, for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. . . . A little generous prudence, a little forbearance of one another, and some grain of charity might win all these diligences to join, and unite in one general and brotherly search after truth. . . . When every stone is laid artfully together in the temple of the Lord, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay, rather the perfection consists in this, that out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure[1]." May the Episcopate of him by whose appointment this Sermon was preached, and for whose welfare in his new office many earnest prayers have been offered up, be made a blessing to England through the growth of such convictions among her children!

The College, Marlborough,
Nov. 25, 1856.

[1] Milton, *Areopagitica*.

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A

SERMON,

&c.

JOHN xvii. 20, 21.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

THESE words form part of that great intercessory prayer, in which Jesus Christ, as our eternal High Priest, consecrated Himself to be also the sacrifice by which our sins should be blotted out, and presented to His Father, in His last solemn supplication, all those in every age for whom He was to die. There are no words in the whole Bible more deeply touching, none which seem to bring us of these latter days into so close and personal a connexion with our Redeemer. For in them He appears to cast forward a glance of Omniscience from the

scene around Him, from that upper chamber and those eleven followers, over the long series of ages which were to roll away between that night of agony and His return to judgment, to survey the countless generations who should call themselves by His name, to behold the boundless expanse of distant lands in which that name should be honoured, to penetrate in thought even to us who are here assembled this day, and to include us in His most merciful and all-embracing prayer. He prayed that all Christians might be one, that however separated by time, by place, by rank and position, by intellectual gifts, by natural or even moral advantages, all might retain an essential unity, which should bind them together in spite of any casual separation. And this *unity of the spirit in the bond of peace* was to be the great instrument for the conversion of the world. He desired that His people might be one, that the world might believe that God had sent Him. Our subject therefore at once divides itself into two parts, (1) the nature of the unity for which Christ prayed; and (2) the result which He designed it to produce. I trust that by God's blessing both these heads may suggest to us thoughts suitable to the solemn service in which we are about to join.

1. First, then, as to the nature of this unity, we see that it is a oneness of spirit, having its pattern in the eternal unity of the Father and the Son, that unity which existed before the world was, and

which has manifested itself in its creation, its redemption, and its providential government. Into this unity we are to enter by the communion of our spirits with God. The unity therefore is spiritual and moral, a union in faith, in hope, in love, in Christian holiness and devotion. Those are partakers in this unity who having put on the mind of Christ, follow in the footsteps of Christ. His prayer was fulfilled, and the true unity of His people displayed to the world, when in the early Church of Jerusalem all that believed were together and had all things common. It was fulfilled when the heathen were unable to refuse to those whom they persecuted the unwilling tribute of respect and admiration, *Behold how these Christians love one another, and are ready to die for one another.* And as time went on, it was fulfilled in many holy practices, in the gatherings every Lord's day for the poor, in the ransom of captives from barbarians, in the foundation of hospitals, colleges, brotherhoods, in the abolition of gladiators' shows in early ages, of the slave-trade and slavery in our own, in the labours of all who have denied themselves, and taken up their cross, and followed the Lord Jesus, in loving and doing good to those around them.

2. Thus, then, has Christ's prayer been fulfilled partially and in isolated cases; thus have men striven to imitate that universal spirit of loving self-devotion of which He set the eternal example on the very morning when He prayed. And now,

brethren, it seems fitting for us to-day, when we are assembled to take part in the most solemn rite of the English Church, to consider whether we, the ministers and other members of that Church, remember Christ's prayer as we should do, and really labour to fulfil it, and by it to accomplish the conversion of the world. We may limit the question to our own Church, because any regrets for the loss of a wider unity would, now at least, be unpractical. We may lament that the Holy Catholic Church throughout all the world is broken up into a thousand fragments, that the Christians of our own land are separated from each other by differences which for the present (though not we trust for ever) appear to be irreconcilable. We may mourn over periods in our history when precious opportunities of peace were heedlessly flung away, we may pray God to build once more the walls of Jerusalem, we may in our own practice seek to promote peace with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, but under the present circumstances of our country, we can scarcely do more. But if such difficulties press upon us as members of the English commonwealth, they have not yet, I trust, reduced us to utter helplessness as members of the English Church. If the nation of England is split up into hostile sects, it does not follow that the Church of England should be for ever split up into hostile parties. Nor would it be so, if we would remember that while a unity of

principle is an essential part of the idea of Christianity, a variety of detail is characteristic of man's nature, and therefore sanctioned by the religion which does not contradict that nature, but only seeks to restore and elevate and redeem it. As God displays his glory in creation by the multiplicity of His works, so does He show it forth in grace by the sanctification of a thousand individual peculiarities. It has been said that in matters of thought and speculation all men may be ranged as followers of one or other of the two greatest philosophers of Greece. So too in politics, we generally find in every free commonwealth, a party inclined to change, and a party inclined to preserve things as they are. It is no less true that in theology Christians have been ranged from the first mainly under two divisions, those who incline to a system of authority, discipline, and subordination, and therefore to a worship more or less formal and ceremonial, and those who in a freer spirit prefer a simpler outward service, a religion more personal, independent, and unfettered. In a healthy state of things, these should exist side by side, each modifying and correcting any tendencies to extravagance in the other. We see traces of both in the New Testament; and if St. Paul preaches above all things the paramount necessity of a personal faith, the sanctity of the individual conscience, and the spiritual communion of each soul with God, he does not neglect to inculcate

order and discipline, and strongly enjoins us to be tolerant towards those whose view of outward observances differs from our own. No doubt he severely condemns any attempt to force such observances upon Christians; yet, while he tells a Gentile Church, that *if they are circumcised Christ shall profit them nothing*, he does not refuse to conciliate the Jews, by permitting the rite to a convert sprung from their nation. And this twofold view of Christianity, from which have arisen half the controversies of Church history, is properly recognized and allowed in a national Church like ours, which seeks to unite in its fold the different feelings and influences which separate the various classes of a whole people. For of two things, one: either we must stifle all dissension by the fiction of an infallible living earthly authority, whose voice is as the voice of God Himself, or we must cling fast to that unity which consists in a true faith in Christ crucified, and tolerate diversity in non-essentials. It is in this spirit that Hooker[1] declares the unity of the Church to consist only in *One Lord, one faith, one baptism;* adding that *in whomsoever these things are, the Church doth acknowledge them as her children; them only she counteth for aliens and strangers in whom these things are not found.* The traces of compromise and a desire

[1] Hooker, *Eccl. Polity*, iii. l. § 7. The whole passage is most important, as are the comments upon it in Hare's *Mission of the Comforter*, notes A, D.

of comprehension are visible in the foundation, the constitution, and the services of the Church. While we praise God in the words which Ambrose and Augustine chanted in the Basilica of Milan[2], and can trace our collects to the prayers and liturgies of the great Popes Gregory and Leo, we yet can refer other parts of our services to the influence not only of English but even of foreign Protestants. Yet in spite of these undeniable facts, our present practice bears few signs of toleration and forbearance; the harmonious action of the Church, its warfare against wickedness and unbelief, is interrupted by unseemly disputes on forms and decorations and doctrinal subtleties; and doubtful points of disputation are recklessly mooted and acrimoniously contested. No doubt it is said that this is but a sign of the earnest activity, to which God in His mercy has roused the Church from the torpor of the last century; and that because men care more for faith and duty, therefore they are so much at variance among themselves as to the manner of fulfilling them. But must we then acquiesce in the conclusion that Christian earnestness is incompatible with Christian charity, that our Lord's

[2] The *Te Deum* is called the *Canticum S. Ambrosii et Augustini* in the Sarum Breviary. While we reject the common legend of the manner of its composition, there seems no reason against the belief that they were its authors, though it has been attributed to others, such as Hilary of Poictiers (A.D. 355) or of Arles (A.D. 440). See Procter *on the Common Prayer*, p. 201.

prayer for His followers can never be accomplished, that their unity is a fantastic dream? It is melancholy and disheartening if in curing one evil we must rush into its opposite, and can never combine tolerant forbearance with true piety and devoted enthusiasm. There are, indeed, extreme cases, in which separation is unavoidable, for it would be mere formalism to insist on outward union as a cloak for inward disunion and hatred. But surely there are many points of opinion, and practice, and ritual observance, on which a divergence may well be tolerated, if only men will duly estimate the worth of that Christian wisdom and humility which leads them to observe the positive laws and institutions of the Church, to obey the godly monitions of those who are set over them, to consult the wishes, the feelings, even the prejudices of their brethren, and above all, which feels and knows, that by showing forth the faith of Christ crucified in their teaching and their practice, they are using the means divinely ordained to regenerate the world. While, therefore, we thank God for every new symptom of increased activity in the Church, we cannot but lament that less interest and excitement is shown in the struggle against positive wickedness, than in some dispute about a cross, a vestment, or a candlestick. And such regret is most consistent with the principles of a Church which has numbered among its ministers on the one hand Andrewes, and Herbert, and Law, and Wilson,

on the other, Latimer, and Leighton, and Newton, and Cecil; while by the side of both have been ranged men who have united Christian faith with eminence in speculation and philosophy, Hooker, and Cudworth, and Berkeley, and Butler. It is no fault in its constitution, but rather its great glory, that Ken found in it so much apostolical order, that he only left it at last with hesitation and reluctance, from a political, not a theological scruple; that Wesley so far acknowledged its evangelical truth that he never deserted its communion, though he struggled against its discipline; that on the revival of its life and energy in these latter days, it has still asserted its old character, still winning to a living faith in Christ men of diverse habits and tastes and feelings, and reckoning among those who have lived and died in its service, Heber, and Simeon, and Henry Martyn, and Arnold, and Hare.

3. The sense of this difference between the outward unity into which we vainly endeavour to force all men, and the oneness of spirit for which Christ prayed, is pressed upon us when we pass, in the second place, to the intended result of that unity, the conversion of the world, connected as it is with the great solemnity for which we are assembled here. For we reflect with sorrow on the hindrances which those "unhappy divisions" which we annually[3] lament, but take little pains to heal, will raise up

[3] In the Service for the Queen's Accession.

in the path of those who are called to the highest office in the Christian ministry, and who ought to be left free to devote their whole time and thought to the mighty work of changing the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of the Lord. With regard indeed to a colonial diocese, it may be hoped that the danger is less urgent than it is in England. In a country where the Church has almost to be built up from the foundation, a country filled with adventurous colonists casually brought together, indifferent in many cases to Christ's Gospel, and bordered by savage tribes to whom His very name is unknown, we may hope that His ministers have sufficient occupation, in the simple preaching of Christ crucified, and do not weary themselves, or distract their hearers, by profitless subtleties of theology. We may trust that the pastor of such a fold, as he is leaving friends and home and country for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, will be permitted to devote his whole mind and strength to that object which we know to be nearest to his heart, the declaration of Christian redemption to those who, whether wilfully or ignorantly, are living apart from God. But at home it is vain to indulge in any such expectation, unless by God's mercy we are brought to feel how deep, how real, how infinitely and eternally important are the wants directly before us, how vain, and transitory are the trifles on which we waste the strength of the Church. Think for one moment of the various

characteristics of this mighty city in which we are met together this day. Here in this vast wilderness, teeming with life and activity, in this greatest of cities, this chosen seat of commerce and government, this home of misery and splendour, of wisdom and folly, of heroic Christian goodness, and desperate wickedness, we should at least devote all our energies to fulfil our Saviour's prayer, labouring with one heart and one spirit, to persuade the world that the Father sent the Son to save it. For let us consider the condition of different classes among its inhabitants, and we shall see how fully their moral needs are met by the Gospel and Church of Christ, the Gospel with its revealed truths, its warnings, its threatenings, its consolations, its hopes, its divine morality and perfect wisdom; the Church with its Sacraments and public ministrations, its visits from house to house, its prayers, and stern rebukes, and loving benedictions. First, we will take the lowest class of all, those of whom it has been said that *they perish in the open streets, beneath the pitiless pelting of the storm, of cold, of hunger, and of broken hearts*[4]. It is needless to harrow up your feelings by the often repeated tale of children trained to crime from their very cradles, of outcast wanderers and abandoned profligates, of streets and alleys where the name of God is never heard except in blasphemy. But it is well for us to be mindful

[4] Bishop Horsley. It is the motto to Guthrie's *Second Plea for Ragged Schools.*

of the utter infidelity which is gradually spreading among the working classes in our cities, of the speculations of secularists as they are called, who deny to man any hope beyond the grave, any duty except that of providing for the wants of this life, and against whom Christ's servants are bound to contend, not only in argument, but with the yet more efficacious weapons of Christian faith and love. Or if we ascend higher in the scale of society, to that commercial class which forms the pride and support of London, and fulfils the presage contained in the name *the City of Ships*, there also we must often lament the absence of any practical faith that Christ has redeemed the world from sin. As a commercial nation we have been startled and have felt degraded by the revelation of dishonesty among them, of reckless speculation often with the property of others, of ruin and misery widely spread through careless or dishonourable selfishness, sometimes even veiled under religious or charitable professions, while the frauds of the princely merchant are only too faithfully imitated by the petty cheating and adulterated goods of the tradesman. Advancing yet farther, we come to that class which seems to pride itself in contradicting the very words of our Lord, by boastfully claiming the title of the World, and thus openly disregarding His warning not to love the world nor the things of the world, and his repeated declaration that this love is incompatible with the love of the Father. Surely

cannot be denied that the Gospel in its simple fulness is the true remedy for the evils of this class also. For if we believe the plain words of the New Testament, we can only regard it as a great sin, and absolute contradiction of Christianity, that a large number of persons spend their lives in frivolity and selfish gratification, or in vehement struggles after their own advancement; that many are separated from their brethren by the artificial distinctions of vanity and pride, and are living and dying in forgetfulness of Christ's command to work for their good. If there is truth in the Parable of the Talents, and in the condemnation of him who said unto his soul, *Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;* if the indifference of the rich man to the sufferings of Lazarus was a sin which God would not pardon; if luxury and extravagance, and flattery and self-seeking are displeasing in His sight, then we must believe that in the higher, no less than the lower walks of London society, there is much to deplore, to rebuke, and to reform. Now our text tells us that Christ's people were united into one body, and entrusted with ordinances, Sacraments, and the keeping of God's Word, in order that they might lift up their voice in their Master's Name, against the vices of all classes and all professions, and work in one earnest spirit of devotion till Christ's Gospel is accepted, and its pure and holy precepts obeyed by all God's children. It is then a grievous waste of power and energy, if with such a

task before us, we are disputing about minute points which need not break asunder the unity for which Christ prayed, while the swelling tide of human sin and misery rolls unheeded by us, bearing to other ears than ours the defiance of the ungodly, the cries and prayers of them that have none to help. For while we are thus turning away from the straight path of duty, the newspaper writer, the satirist, the popular novelist are labouring to correct those evils which the Church was designed to cure[5], and some colour is given for the startling assertion of a modern writer, that the press is the chief spiritual power in England. Nor would we for a moment disparage its efforts, only we must believe that the voice of Christian kindness or grave rebuke, the sight of self-denying charity, the declaration of Christ's love for man, will do more to regenerate society than the sting of sarcasm, or the denunciation of eloquent invective. Above all, Christian morality is the true corrective to that false sentimentalism, which confines all virtue to mere benevolence. And if it be true, as has been lately said, that London is less moral now than it was half a century ago, and that the hold of the Church on the mass of the people is not strengthening, it is time for us to enquire whether the sight

[5] This point has been lately noticed by Mr. Gurney, in his admirable sermon at the consecration of the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, a sermon which it is to be hoped will not be without fruit.

of its dissensions may not be the chief cause of this alienation, and to turn from the fruitless questions which tear it asunder, to the duty of labouring with one heart and one mind, as servants of Jesus Christ, to stay the plague of guilt and wretchedness.

4. Nor can we fail to be encouraged in this holy work, when we turn to the brighter side of the picture, and remember the enormous facilities afforded for it in a great commercial city. If the close contact of human beings in its densely-packed streets involves peculiar dangers, and fosters peculiar vices, it is no less certain that these are counteracted by peculiar helps and blessings. For that man should found and inhabit great cities is plainly the intention of God's providence. When He established the Hebrew tribes in the cities of Canaan, He declared that man as a citizen is superior to man as a dweller in tents. He accepted the magnificent buildings and costly offerings of Solomon. It is proved by experience and observation that the life of the agricultural poor in England is not more conducive to morality than that of the same class in our great towns. And in a city like London, what opportunities are there for the development of intelligence, and for that mental culture which God designs to promote moral culture, what a field for energy, activity, and self-reliance! A clergyman from the country, who has too often to

lament the obstacles opposed to the education of the labouring class, by the jealousy and obstinacy of those immediately above them, must envy the condition of London in this respect, where the intellect is quickened, and the appetite for knowledge excited by the very circumstances of society. Only let us hope that the ministrations of the Church may be enabled in some way or other to overtake this enormous population, so that in London, no less than in the country towns, they may penetrate into every court and alley, and none of those for whom Christ died may be abandoned to heathenism or starvation. Nor need we despair of witnessing, by God's mercy, the gradual accomplishment even of so great a work as this, if we remember what has been done already, and call to mind what stores of wealth are readily expended here on Christian objects, and what willing labour is bestowed upon them by many whose hearts respond to the greatness of the need, by earnest and devoted women, by young students in various professions, by the good and thoughtful in every class, all ready to assist, to encourage, and to cheer Christ's ministers in their glorious mission. So let us strive and pray that God's Spirit may enable us to employ all this strength in convincing the world that Jesus Christ is its Saviour, and persuade us that our work is not to propagate our peculiar tastes and opinions, nor to agitate the Church by internal quarrels, but

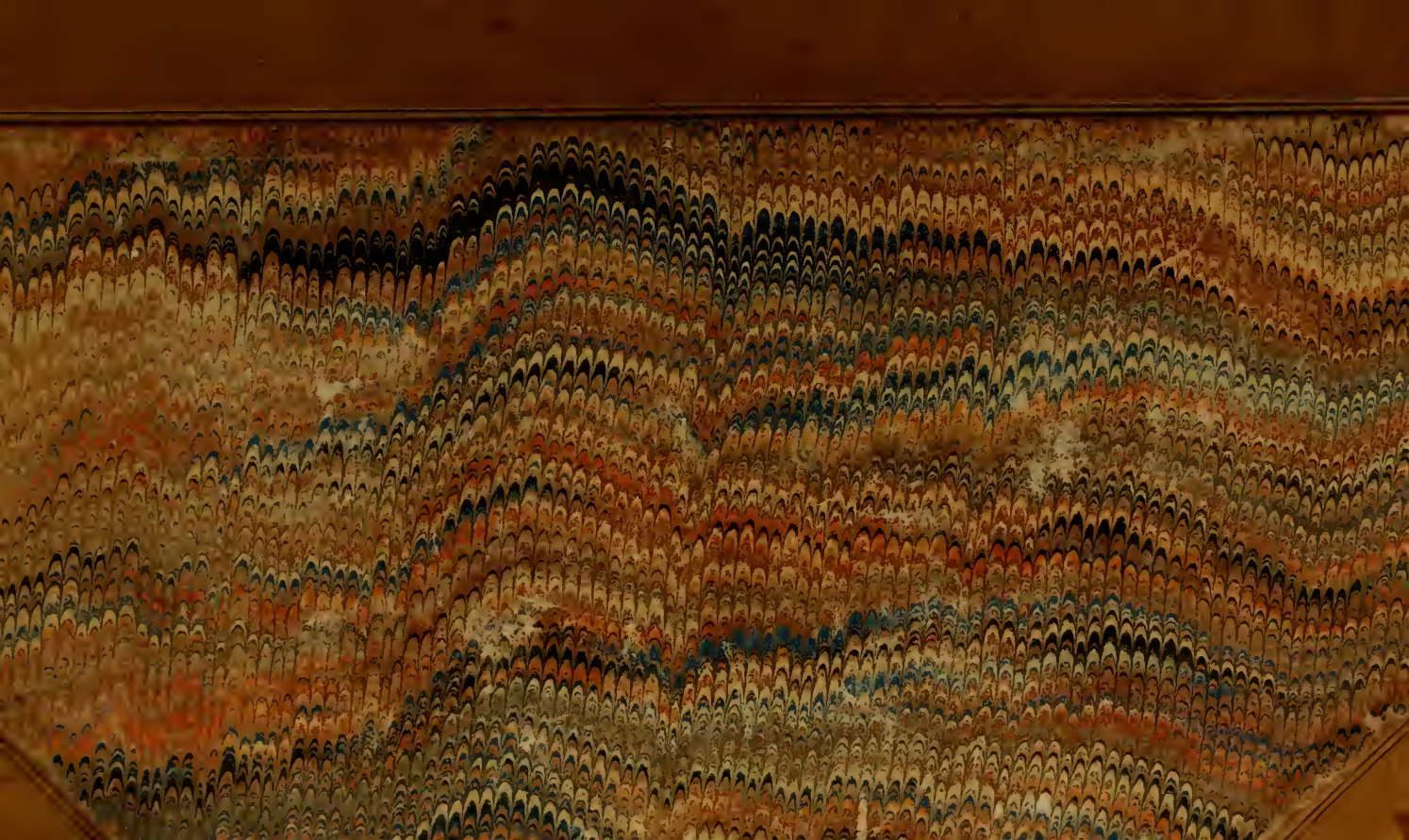
to leaven our country with the principles of the Gospel, to show to the frivolous and careless a pattern of self-sacrificing devotion, to teach all men to love one another, and trust one another, and to tell the despairing outcast of that *godliness*, *which has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

5. Such then, brethren, is pre-eminently the work of him, who is now to be dedicated to God as the spiritual head and father of this Diocese, the ruler and guide of those who in such a city preach the faith of Christ crucified. But how can so great a task be performed? What character, what combination of qualities will enable any one rightly to discharge an office, which may well be called sublime, considering how it is fraught with opportunities for good to our own and future generations? Surely no natural gifts are sufficient for it, not the calmest judgment, not the most conciliating patience, not the keenest sense of duty. To be proved by affliction and prosperity, to be familiar by long experience with the education both of rich and poor, with preaching and visiting from house to house, with the government of others and the ministration of Christian ordinances, all these things may prepare a man for his work, they cannot enable him so to perform it as to save his brethren's souls. Yet he will be made equal to the task by the help of the Lord Jesus, who

will hold him up lest he faint under the burden, and is always ready to come when He is diligently and faithfully sought. Let us pray then that He may be amongst us by His Spirit at this solemn time. As we began, so let us end by seeking encouragement from His own blessed words, His own last prayer for His disciples, in which He condescends to compare His mission with theirs. *Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes also I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth.* "Consecrate[6] them," for such is the meaning of His words, "consecrate them for the ministry to which I have called them, by putting into their hearts the saving knowledge of the Gospel. As thou hast sent me, so am I sending them. For their sakes also I consecrate myself as an offering for sin, that in me they may be consecrated to labour for the conversion of the world." Strengthened by the recollection of such a prayer, the servants of Christ will go forth to

[6] John xvii. 17—19. The word translated *sanctify* is ἁγιάζω. This cannot mean *sanctify* in the ordinary sense, when applied in v. 19 to Him who is holy and undefiled, and therefore it must mean *consecrate* throughout the passage. Cf. Matt. xxiii. 17, ὁ ναὸς ὁ ἁγιάζων τὸν χρυσόν. Also Rom. xv. 17; 1 Tim. iv. 5; and particularly John x. 36, ὃν ὁ πατὴρ ἡγίασε καὶ ἀπέστειλεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον.

their great and solemn ministry, sure of their Master's help and blessing in fulfilling that holy office, of which His own work is the type and pattern, and therefore faithfully following in the steps of Him, who is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

THE END.

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